

**Testimony in support of SB 929, An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free School Meals to All Students, February 7, 2023**

Senator Maher, Representative Linehan and members of the Committee on Children, my name is Dr. Lawrence Edwards. I live in Stamford. I am a psychotherapist and a parent. **I am testifying in strong support of SB 929 An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free School Meals to All Students.**

The well-being of Connecticut children is essential to the future of our state. Approximately 130,000 Connecticut children live in households that cannot provide them with enough food. Preventing them from experiencing the acute and chronic effects of hunger is a top priority. It's hard for me to imagine that we might sit back and ignore the plight of these children and families.

The negative health and academic consequences of child food insecurity and the benefits of implementation of free school meals are well documented. For instance, math scores improve and student suspensions decrease. A 2021 summary of the impact of free school meal programs concluded with: "Research suggests that policy targeting student nutrition, particularly through the increased provision of breakfast, may be one of the more cost-effective policy approaches to improve student learning outcomes and test scores (<https://www.americanactionforum.org/research/health-and-education-impacts-of-the-school-breakfast-program-and-national-school-lunch-program/>)"

Investing in our children in such a simple manner yields great benefits for our entire society and empowers our youth to grow into creative, productive members of our society. How could one possibly object to this?

A few years ago, as I started my employment in a children's health facility in another state, I was surprised to see colleagues booking children and their families to arrive earlier than their appointed times for assessments or therapy. When I inquired about this, they told me that they needed to provide time for the children to eat first so they could participate more meaningfully in their visits and they showed me the well-stocked food pantry that the facility provided for this purpose. They recognized that a hungry child is a child who is miserable and inattentive and that they needed to provide the comfort and sustenance of a meal first and then carry out their appointed visit. This experience has stuck with me. We need to feed hungry children before they can reap the benefits of their school experience. We need to do this as caring adults.

I am fortunate that neither I nor my family has experienced hunger and I want to make sure that we do as much as we can to make sure that no child in Connecticut is hungry. Providing free school meals to all students will go a long way to making this happen.

**I strongly urge passage of SB 929 An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free School Meals to All Students.**

Thank you,  
Lawrence Edwards, PhD  
Stamford CT